

**District of Columbia Public Schools  
District of Columbia Department of Health  
School-Based STD Screening Program  
Frequently Asked Questions**

**Why are DC Public Schools and Health Department offering STD screening in the schools?**

Unfortunately, the District of Columbia has high rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) among young people. The District's rate of chlamydia is three times the national average. Among high schools students, the rates are as high as 1 out of 5 students. Chlamydia and gonorrhea – the two STDs to be tested – are curable, but left untreated can cause serious harm to young people and can make it difficult for them to have children in the future. Also, having a STD increases the risk of getting HIV. Often chlamydia and gonorrhea have no symptoms and young people may be unaware that they are transmitting the disease to others. By offering free and easy STD screening, young people can know more about their health and, if necessary, receive free treatment from the DC Department of Health. Chancellor Rhee has given her full support to this critical opportunity to ensure the current and future health of young District residents. New York City and Philadelphia are two cities that are conducting school-based STD screening successfully and helping to reduce STD rates among young people.

**Is this mandatory?**

No. The screening is completely optional. Students do not have to take the test and parents can choose not to have their children tested.

**What information is given to parents and what has been their reaction?**

The Health Department has prepared an information letter that is provided to the high school principal for distribution to teachers to hand out to the students. The letter describes why the schools and Health Department are offering the free screening and how the screening is conducted. It also includes the Health Department telephone number for more information and a form for parents to choose not to have their children screened. There has been little reaction from parents on the screening. A few have opted not to have their children screened and some have contacted the Health Department for more information.

**Don't you need parental consent to screen for chlamydia and gonorrhea among adolescents?**

No. The public health laws in the District state that the Health Department can diagnose and treat minors of any age for STDs without parental consent. We will engage parents in every step of the program and have offered them an "opt out" option if they do not want their child to participate.

### **Will the test results be shared with the school and parents?**

According to DC law, test results cannot be shared with anyone other than the young person tested. The information is strictly confidential. Only the student – not the school, parent(s), guardian(s), or caregiver(s) – will have access to this information. The young person will receive their results and be offered free treatment – completed in a single dose of antibiotics – by the Health Department.

### **What role do principals, teachers and school nurses have with the screening?**

The Health Department takes the lead with conducting the screening and asks for minimal help from school personnel. The Health Department will provide a full description of the program to principals, teachers and school nurses. The basic ask of the schools is to help the Health Department inform students and parents about the screening and seek their advice on the best way to reach students at their school. The Health Department asks the principals to circulate the parent information letter for teachers to hand out to their students. Health Department staff will talk with the teachers about their students and how best to engage them at the school. Similarly, Health Department staff will talk with school nurses about the screening and treatment when necessary. There may be an occasional request for a school nurse to assist the Health Department on rescreening a student or providing the single treatment.

### **How does this work?**

The Health Department will schedule sessions with the high schools to conduct the screening. In advance, the principal will be provided with a parent notification letter and opt-out form. Public health professionals will conduct an information session on STDs, including how to prevent getting STDs and the serious consequences of having STDs and not being tested or getting treatment for them. The public health professionals will then provide a bag with informational material, a card for the student to write a password to use for obtaining test results from the Health Department and a urine cup. The students then go to the restroom and use individual stalls. There a student may opt to urinate into the cup or not. In either case, the bag is returned confidentially to the public health professional. The test results are available within two weeks. The student calls the Health Department to get his or her results. If the test result is positive, the student can go to the DC STD Clinic, a community teen health clinic or their own medical provider for the treatment. The Health Department can also schedule a time to provide treatment at the high school. The student will be counseled on ways to stay healthy. Further, the Health Department will notify any sexual partners of the student to make sure they are tested and, if positive, treated. Chlamydia and gonorrhea are cured with a single dose of oral antibiotics.

### **Will the Health Department provide comprehensive STD education?**

No. The health session is a 20 minute presentation that briefly reviews gonorrhea and chlamydia, highlights certain STD educational messages (such as unprotected oral sex is low risk for becoming infected with HIV but high risk for becoming infected with gonorrhea or chlamydia, being infected with STDs increases the risk of acquiring HIV infection if exposed, many STD infections are asymptomatic, etc.), and provides information on local health care providers that offer HIV and STD screening and treatment.

### **Besides screening for and treating STDs, do you also teach how to prevent STDs?**

Yes. We emphasize the ABCs of STD prevention - the only 100% effective way to prevent an STD is to remain Abstinent, followed by “Being Faithful” or only having sex within a long term monogamous relationship, and finally touching on the effective use of “Condoms.”

**Why do testing in the schools? Why not do testing at health clinics?**

Adolescents face multiple barriers to accessing health care, such as lack of insurance or other ability to pay, lack of transportation, discomfort with facilities and services designed for adults, and concerns about confidentiality. School based screening and treatment programs have shown to decrease the rates of chlamydia among participating high school students. Also, the new availability of highly accurate and easy-to-conduct urine tests for chlamydia and gonorrhea provides the opportunity to screen large numbers of young people in a confidential manner.

**How many students will participate at a time?**

Approximately 20 to 30 students will receive the health information and be offered the screening in 45 minute sessions. The Health Department will conduct five (5) sessions per day at the school for a total of 100 to 150 students per day until total student population has been given opportunity to participate.

**How many schools will participate?**

The Health Department plans to conduct the health information sessions and screenings at all public high schools during the course of the 2010-2011 school year.

**Who do I contact to get more information?**

Please contact Letitia Winston at the DC Health Department STD Control Program at 202-442-9408.